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Item Type	Article
Authors	Pfister, Lauren F.
Publisher	Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, Chung Chi College, Shatin, Hong Kong
Rights	Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, Chung Chi College, Shatin, Hong Kong
Download date	2026-11-16 15:28:02
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4277559

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Ching Feng, n.s., 19.1–2 (2020) 49–69

Culturally Transformative Impacts from the Reformation in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (1530s) and Liang Qichao's *New People Theory* (1902)

LAUREN F. PFISTER

Abstract

Normally when we think of the Reformation, we consider matters related to German and French movements in the sixteenth century, among other places in western and northern Europe. Nevertheless, there were other "reformations" as well that took place in southern Europe, and their total impact left a refracted impact even in traditional China at the beginning of the twentieth century. Consequently, in this article, I explore the impact of the Italian Reformation on the special mural work dealing with *The Last Judgment* painted by Michelangelo on the altar wall within the Sistine Chapel and consider how the well-known Ruist reformer, Liang Qichao, interpreted the life and work of Martin Luther.

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This paper was previously presented at the conference: "Celebrating 500 Years of the Reformation: The Reformation's Culturally Transformative Influences and Impacts—European and Asian Cultural Perspectives," Hong Kong Baptist University, September 22–23, 2017.

I. INTRODUCTORY MUSINGS: COMPARATIVE TRANSFORMATIVE INFLUENCES

From the outset, it is both appropriate and wise to note the vast differences between the two case studies that are the focus of this paper. Numerous studies have dealt with this matter regarding Michelangelo, but in my research, for this essay, I have not found even one published book or article where the main topic directly relates the life and/or written works of Liang Qichao to Martin Luther or the sixteenth century Lutheran Reformation. Still, in the latter case, some articles and a few books deal with Protestant Christian influences on Liang's life as well as his general assessments of the various forms of Christianity that he knew about.

All this being so, still in both cases within this study, what I am discussing could be new realms of research. There are very few articles or authors who have connected the Christocentric imagery of *The Last Judgment* with the Italian Reformation[1] in its expression within what is now referred to as "Virtuban Spirituality." Before the twentieth century, it was not known that Michelangelo had any connections to either the Italian Reformation or its Spanish originator. A few years ago, however, his relationship to Virtuban Spirituality has been the main theme of a book published by Sarah Prodan, who focused on the impact of his "spiritual poetry" rather than his Sistine chapel painting.[2] On the other hand, Liang Qichao published his twenty essays on the "New People Theory" in accessible newspapers, creating quite a stir due to his perceived intellectual and political status as well as the intensity of his claims, and yet almost no Chinese scholars have linked this to his interest and appreciation of the Protestant Reformation, not to mention his explicit mentioning of Martin Luther. Consequently, then, these two unusual explorations of the reach and impact of the re-

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[1] According to Maghenzani, the phrase "the Italian Reformation" is now a preferred term of reference among historians than "the Reformation in Italy," for reasons that will be made explicit later in this article. Consult Simone Maghenzani, "The Protestant Reformation in Counter-Reformation Italy, c. 1550–1660: An Overview of New Evidence," *Church History* 83, no. 3 (September 2014): 571–89, esp. 573 for the passage mentioned above.

[2] See Sarah Rolfe Prodan, *Michelangelo's Christian Mysticism: Spirituality, Poetry, and Art in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

ligious, cultural, and historical importance of key conceptions of the Reformation into non-Germanic cultural contexts that have many times been either overlooked or understated in reflections on the influences of the Protestant Reformation highlight the value of this current study and should prompt all of us to reconsider what may be taken to be "standard interpretations" that do not account for these influences.

Here we have some cultural influences of notable character, but we should still ask ourselves: How transformative were they in their cultural influences? Can there be some transformative cultural influences and impacts that are initiated and then ultimately fail? Were these influences and impacts something recognized already by Michelangelo and Liang Qichao themselves in their situations, or were they still inchoate enough that even though these two men recognized their presence, they were not able to discern fully either their religious significance or their subsequent culturally transformative developments within their cultural spheres in the Italian Peninsula and Late Qing Empire respectively?

These questions require more background information and the addressing of other relevant questions related to both Michelangelo and Liang Qichao, issues that I intend to address and answer in the subsequent portions of this essay. Only after we have completed more thorough studies of both men's encounters with ideas stemming from the German Reformation, will I then answer those questions directly within my concluding reflections.

II. MOVING FROM THE SISTINE CEILING TO THE ALTAR WALL'S SCENE OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

A. The Sistine Chapel Ceiling's Mural: Michelangelo Buonarroti's Signature Painting

From the angle of the history of Italian Renaissance art, Michelangelo's (1475–1564) choice to take up the reigning pope's offer to produce a ceiling mural in the Sistine Chapel, starting at a time in 1504 when he had not yet reached 30 years of age and was known primarily for his sculptures and not for painting, was a bold decision that would utterly change his destiny as an artist. It was also complicated by the notoriously intense and impulsive character of "the warrior pope," Pope Jul-

ius II (1443–1510), who would die within a year after the ceiling mural had been completed.[3] The contrast between what the ceiling and that altar mural of the Sistine Chapel looked like before and after Michelangelo's work was completed reveals that his paintings presented a worldview imbued with biblical, historical, and mythical themes.[4]

Nevertheless, it is the case that Michelangelo—along with so many other painters in Italy and elsewhere, including Leonardo de Vinci—did not know Latin. If, then, Michelangelo as a Roman Catholic could not read the Vulgate Bible,[5] from where did he get his biblical information? What was the source of the biblical knowledge that inspired Michelangelo's elevated visions—the divine acts of creation, stories from biblical and oracular histories, the details from genealogies, and other premonitions linked to the coming Messiah? From which biblical resources did he obtain his understanding to fuel his artistic imagination?[6]

Among the reasons why these kinds of questions directly related to Michelangelo's own life and writings that are worth readdressing at this time is the fact that within the past ten years a major work on the Sistine Chapel's religious symbolism has focused *instead* on how theologians and intellectuals after Michelangelo's death interpreted those

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[3] The phrase, "warrior pope," was a designation employed by Ross King as the title of one of the early chapters in his much-appreciated study, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), esp. 28–37.

[4] Many others have dealt with the other murals found on the side walls of the Sistine Chapel that were produced by other Renaissance painters, but those will not be addressed here. For a relatively recent account of those murals taken from a very different interpretive position, consult Heinrich W. Pfeiffer, S.J., *The Sistine Chapel: A New Vision*, trans. Steven Lindberg (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2007). For an image of the Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo's paintings began, see Johannes Wilde, *Michelangelo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 49.

[5] This fact was highlighted recently in a response written by Joost Keizer of Yale University in a "Letter to the Editor" challenging Keizer's interpretations in a previously published article, that letter being written by Robert Williams of the University of California at Santa Barbara. Keizer wrote straightforwardly that "Michelangelo could not read Latin ...," and added parenthetically in a later passage, "... (Leonardo, in common with Michelangelo, could not read Latin)." For these comments and the larger context in which they arose, consult "Letter to the Editor," *Art Bulletin* 95, no. 4 (December 2015): 656–58, the quotations above being found on p. 657.

[6] Images of the elements of the Sistine Chapel's ceiling are found in a series of three photographic plates in King, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, 183. A color-coded analysis of the ceiling that is a helpful way to understand its various elements is offered in Loren W. Partridge, Gianluigi Colalucci, and Fabrizio Mancinelli, *Michelangelo—The Last Judgment: A Glorious Restoration* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 17.

works. This indirect approach has been justified in part by the claims that Michelangelo himself was obviously not a trained theologian and, in this regard, his own opinions about why he produced those works would presumably not be as enlightening as those later interpretations.[7] As will be seen below, there are some good reasons to question that kind of interpretive justification, since many sources for Michelangelo's inspirations (both earlier and later in his life) can be identified, and some are directly related to Italian reform movements within the Roman Catholic settings of his day. I take these alternatives to be worth reconsidering especially from a more conciliar interpretive perspective framed within and motivated by a post-Vatican II theological openness to these matters.

All major twentieth-century studies of Michelangelo's early life underscore the fact that the young artist was profoundly influenced by the iconoclastic and counter-cultural homiletic fervor of the Dominican friar, who was assigned pastoral duties in the city of Florence around 1490, Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498).[8] Already by that time, there was a new Italian demotic version of the Bible produced by Niccolo Malermi—known under various names as the *Biblia pauperum* (The Poor Man's Bible), *Biblia vulgare istoriata*, or more simply as the Malermi Bible—one so popular that a version with illustrations was printed in 1493.[9] One detailed study of the woodcuts found within that

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[7] This is the essential position adopted by Pfeiffer in his "new vision" of the paintings in the Sistine Chapel, but it stands in opposition to a large amount of earlier and ongoing interpretive work that suggests that there is much more that can be confirmed about Michelangelo's biblical understanding and sources of theological insight that should not be set aside so quickly. As will be indicated below, some of those biblical resources are surprising due to their links to Italian reformers and reform spirituality within Italian cultural spheres, matters that some Roman Catholic interpreters in the past and even currently would seemingly prefer not to discuss.

[8] King writes dramatically about the "fire and brimstone" prophetic sermons of Savonarola and their impact on contemporary Florentine society as well as on some of Michelangelo's later paintings (King, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, 89–93). Notably, in his notes to that section, King cites elaborations of Savonarola's influences on the life and artistic work of Michelangelo from major studies by Charles de Tolnay, Edgar Wind, and Ascanio Condivi (King, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, 325, endnotes 9–14). See also Robert Caughlan, *The Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti based on Studies in the Archives of the Buonarroti Family at Florence*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), and John Addington Symonds, *The World of Michelangelo: 1475–1564* (Amsterdam: Time-Life Books, 1966). Notably, one of Michelangelo's older brothers, Lionardo, also a Dominican monk, had been defrocked due to his affiliations with the fiery Italian reformer, as mentioned also in King, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, 93.

[9] Mentioned briefly and with other passing references in King, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, 202–4.

1493 version of the Malermi Bible confirms that three of the ten "golden medallions" decorating the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel "bear a striking resemblance" to three woodcuts in that popular illustrated Italian Bible.[10] Not only were Michelangelo and others within his family and city deeply influenced by early Italian reformers, they also had obtained extensive biblical knowledge from reading a version of the Bible in a non-standard Italian translation, a pattern of reforming influences that would also mark the German Reformation that took place three decades later.[11]

B. Influences of Spanish Reform in the Italian Peninsula through Juan de Valdés

Though more than forty years ago de Tolnay had already linked Michelangelo's spirituality during the last twenty-six years of his life indirectly with the religious reformist ideas of the younger Spanish nobleman, Juan de Valdés (c. 1490–1541), through his connection with the Italian noblewoman, Vittoria Colonna (1490/92–1547), later writings about the relationship between Michelangelo and Colonna have most often been concerned with their sharing of religious poetry and also some of Michelangelo's sketches of the person of the Christ.[12] Notably, in de Tolnay's earlier work he described the linkages between Valdés, Colonna, and ultimately Michelangelo, describing Michelangelo's encounter with "the most important religious current" of the "Italian Reformation" as being the stimulus for what de Tolnay calls his "religious 'conversion,'" meaning by this that Michelangelo never left the Roman Catholic church itself, but took up new theological ide-

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[10] Citing Esther Gordon Dotson, "An Augustinian Interpretation of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling, Part II," *Art Bulletin* 61, no. 3 (September 1979): 421, left column. Find a related comment in Edgar Wing, "Typology in the Sistine Chapel: A Critical Comment," *Art Bulletin* 33, no. 1 (March 1951): 42.

[11] Here there is an unstated question about the generalizations one can make about "reformation" as a culturally transformative expression of certain kinds of religious and political movements. In this essay I will assume that there are different kinds of reformations taking place in this period—in Spanish, Italian, and German cultural contexts. Their interrelationships are at times explicit, as we will see in the case of Michelangelo.

[12] See the recently published volume by Prodan, but also the insightful study by Una Roman E'Elia, "Drawing Christ's Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Aesthetics of Reform," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006): 90–129, and Alexander Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna," *Art Bulletin* 79, no. 4 (December 1997): 647–68.

as that adopted the doctrine of "justification by faith alone."[13] Nevertheless, the impact of de Valdés on Italian elites within various city-states of sixteenth-century Italy has not been often discussed in English or Chinese studies, though it had received important emphasis in both recent Spanish[14] and Italian studies[15] that focus on the life and works of that young Spanish nobleman. What is learned from those studies as well as de Tolnay's classical work is that de Valdés had published an anonymous work that criticized the corruption in the Roman Catholic Church around 1528, and in order to escape condemnation from the Spanish Inquisition, he fled to the Italian Peninsula, spending significant time in Rome and Naples. During that time, he began translating the Bible into Spanish from the standard Greek and Hebrew texts and initiated a group of like-minded Italian Christian intellectuals that involved some major religious figures, including Vittoria Colonna. It is from de Tolnay's study that one finds the first direct account of why he believed Michelangelo had integrated ideas from these Spanish and Italian sources of theological reformation into his fresco of *The Last Judgment.* Having compared the first sketches of that massive mural with the actual painting that is preserved in the Sistine Chapel, de Tolnay argues that there was a shift in the content of the mural that revealed the profound influence of the Reform doctrine of "justification by faith alone."[16] In order to comprehend this claim adequately, I will

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[13] Drawing on Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo: Sculptor, Painter, Architect* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 100–105, quotations found on pp. 100 and 103.

[14] Especially in Mario Sáchez Arenal, "Juan de Valdés y Miguel Ángel. Una aproximación a la teología del arte" [Juan de Valdés and Michelangelo: An Approximation to the Theology of Art], *Imafronte* 23 (2014): 29–49. Ultimately, however, Arenal discusses the period of poetic and artistic correspondence held between Michelangelo and Colonna, and only suggests how the ideas of Valdés helped to inform the values that led to unusual portrayals of the Christ in special sketches prepared for Colonna by Michelangelo. More insight is given to this interaction within the article by Una Roman D'Elia, but I will argue that an earlier influence occurred within the large mural painting of *The Last Judgment.*

[15] Here the most notable relevant studies have been produced by Massimo Firpo, a number of them being mentioned in Arenal's article within the footnotes. Perhaps the two most prominent monographic studies by Firpo are *Tra alumbrados e 'spirituali': Studi su Juan Valdés* [sic] *e il valdesianesimo nella crisi religiosa del '500 italiano* [Between Alumbrados and the "Spirituals": Studies on Juan Valdés and Valdesianism in the Religious Crisis of the Italian Sixteenth Century] (Florence: Olschki, 1990) and *Dal Sacco di Roma all'Inquisiziohne: Studi su Juan de Valdés e la Riforma italiana* [From the Sack of Rome to the Inquisition: Studies on Juan de Valdés and the Italian Reformation] (Alessandria: Edizioni dell-Orso, 1998).

[16] Relying on de Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 106–8.

address a few themes that come from the correspondence between Michelangelo and Colonna, and then return to affirm and underscore the importance of de Tolnay's discovery.

C. Reforming Theology and Art in the Correspondence Between Michelangelo and Colonna

One of the reasons why Michelangelo might not be considered in the light of Reformation influences, despite studies that reveal influences he received from the Malermi Bible and the circle of "spirituals" formed around Juan de Valdés, including Vittoria Colonna, is due to a new strain of historical research. Various new historical revelations have been drawn from the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, opened to the public in 1999, emphasizing the impact of Italian Protestant converts and communities within the Italian Peninsula as well as well-orchestrated (but ultimately unsuccessful) propaganda campaigns promoted by expatriated Italian reformers and others from Geneva, Holland, and London.[17] From these new historical perspectives, it is important to know that Colonna died in 1547 before the "religious identities" of many of the key players were "progressively clarified … in the 1550s, and mostly in the 1560s."[18] From this perspective, there would be little anticipation of Reform theological ideas having an impact within the "Virtuban spirituality" that Prodan has elaborated at great length in her volume on "Michelangelo's Christian mysticism."[19] Among the most prominent of those theological ideas was "justification by faith alone," a doctrine that places the resurrected Christ in the center of any discussion of salvation, and negates the intercessory roles of any other persons, including the Virgin Mary and any other of the Roman Catholic saints.[20] This implied a shocking reorientation of religious practices within Italian Roman Catholic traditions and provoked some claims that both Colonna and Michelangelo were promoting "heretical" doctrines in some contemporary circles. But at that period, the Italian inquisition had not begun in earnest, and

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[17] As described in Maghenzani, "The Protestant Reformation in Counter-Reformation Italy."

[18] Quoting from ibid., 574.

[19] The second part of the volume by Prodan develops the theme of "Michelangelo and Virtuban Spirituality" in four chapters, constituting at least half of the tome.

[20] This point is emphasized by de Tolnay.

would only peak in the 1580s, when both Colonna and Michelangelo had long since died. So, it can be claimed that

> out of all the public figures who had belonged to the circle of Valdés, Michelangelo alone was never bothered by the Holy Office and forced to choose either the Church or the Reformation. This privileged position was probably due to the universal admiration in which his art was held, and to the fact that his great age and solitary life made him appear inoffensive.[21]

What did occur within their correspondence, besides the creation of poetry that affirmed the unique status of the substitutionary death of the Christ—a doctrine normally associated with the Reformation's emphasis on "salvation by grace alone" and yet affirmed by both Colonna and Michelangelo in these contexts—was a special effort at seeking to lend both verbal and artistic expression to a "higher form" of spiritual meditation, one that did not need to make the blood and tears of those who are suffering explicit in order to evoke the empathy of those who read their poetry or gazed upon artistic works that portrayed such scenes. Though this may seem secondary to the Reformation itself, it was an aspect of the Virtuban spirituality that both Colonna and Michelangelo took very seriously. In their poetry, they spoke of the "elite ability to appreciate intellectual complexity" within Christ's incarnate suffering as *disegno*, or literally, "design"; the use of colorful and explicit images of this sort was referred to as *colore*, and was considered (especially by Michelangelo in his mature work) as vulgar and degrading, not undergirding or uplifting an authentic spirituality.[22] Notably, as can now be seen in any photograph of *The Last Judgment*, there are no explicitly bloody scenes or tearful weeping; instead, there are portrayals of the hopes for heaven and the tortures of hell without anything but a suggestion of emotional states and painful throbs through facial expressions and the torque of bodies. The young resurrected Christ who stands in the center of the mural—rendering the judgment that is worked out in the rest of the mural—has a wound in his side, but there is no blood flowing from it, revealing a paradoxical "bloodless bloodi-

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[21] Quoted from de Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 114.

[22] Elaborated with insight in Una Roman D'Elia, "Drawing Christ's Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Aesthetics of Reform," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006): 99–100.

ness" that was found also in his sketches of the Christ Michelangelo offered as gifts to Colonna.[23]

D. Reformation Theology Illustrated in The Last Judgment

Michelangelo had never met Juan de Valdés, and he began to correspond with Vittoria Colonna in 1537 on themes that delved deeply into the doctrine of "justification by faith alone" both in its theological and aesthetic expressions. This was about two years after he had first sketched out the content of the mural that would become *The Last Judgment*. Nevertheless, de Tolnay has found evidence to indicate that the Virtuban spirituality supporting that major Reformation doctrine was embodied in that majestic mural.[24] In viewing the initial sketch of the planned mural made sometime in 1535 or 1536, de Tolnay noted that the whole sketch—portrayed along the lines of the "ancient myth of the Giants' assault on Olympus"—had Mother Mary leading those members of humanity that were seeking to reach the goal of heavenly glory. In that sketch, Michelangelo portrayed the Virgin Mary "in her pose and gestures" following "the traditional motif of intercession." Nevertheless, in the finished mural as it now remains in the Sistine Chapel, the young resurrected Christ is seen demanding judgment in his "bloodless bloodiness" as a domineering figure, so that "the crowd of saints" whom de Tolnay sees as "trying to stop the execution of judgment" are in fact "helpless before this Judge: intercession is in vain."[25] Remarkably, even the Virgin is found "crouching in fear," and is no longer in a pose suggesting her intercessory role, as would be expected in Roman Catholic theology of that period.[26] Christ alone is the source of salvation and justification.

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[23] The paradoxical nature of these images is developed at length within D'Elia's article, the quotation coming from ibid., 125.

[24] Detailed discussion of the restoration of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the 1990s, as well as an extensive visual portrayal of the whole mural and its various parts, is provided in the two volumes produced by Buranelli and others: Francesco Buranelli, Fabrizio Mancinelli, Gianluigi Colalucci, Nazzareno Gabrielli, Fabio Morresi, and others, *The Last Judgement—I: The Restoration*, and *II: The Plates* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1999).

[25] For a dynamic view of this special mural in the Sistine Chapel, visit the online "virtual tour" accessed by https://www.vatican.va/various/cappelle/index_sistina_en.htm, accessed April 14, 2021.

[26] All previous quotations come from de Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 107–8.

From the angle of Michelangelo's own life, de Tolnay summarizes his spiritual journey as learning how to "die with dignity," something that he had struggled with for the last thirty years of his life.[27] As a young man, he was "an audacious spirit, full of pride, with an uncontrollable temperament," and even though he "represented the plenitude of the Florentine genius at its height" in that period of his life, he had no answer to the question of "dying with dignity." Only in the last decades of his life did Michelangelo discover the answer to that question, by "transcending" his previous pride, and "attaining a Christian universality" expressed in *The Last Judgment* that embodied his new understanding of Christ's role as the unique savior of humankind.[28]

From the culturally transformative moment that *The Last Judgment* continues to portray, not only for Michelangelo's life but also for the eschatological vision of all Christians, it seems all the more appropriate that in a post-Vatican II era—when theological adjustments that have embraced much of Lutheran theology have now taken place among some Roman Catholic theologians, priests, and their laypeople—the Reformation doctrine of "justification by faith alone" through Christ only is still visible in the place where the popes are chosen.

III. MARTIN LUTHER AS HEROIC REFORMER IN LIANG QICHAO'S "NEW PEOPLE THEORY"

What I will seek to describe now, and must use longer descriptions and some analogies to elaborate, is for many who use English or other European languages simply outside the scope of their normal historical knowledge and (even in our so-called "global age") may well involve details that have never before been revealed to them. The status of the two key persons involved in a movement that is now referred to in English as "The Hundred Days Reform of 1898" (*Wuxu Bianfa* 戊戌變法) can hardly be overstated. Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) and his disciple, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), had been given by the

[27] Quoting de Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 100.

[28] Quotations come from ibid., 122.

Manchurian Guangxu 光緒 Emperor[29] the positions that would be equivalent today to a prime minister and his chief of staff respectively. Next to the emperor himself, they were perhaps the two most powerful political leaders in the Qing Empire when the Reform Movement began in June 1898.

A. The Political Context of the 1898 Ruist Reform Movement

Desiring to realize a form of cultural and political modernization that would raise the Qing empire into a new stage of international engagement, the cascade of reform measures that Kang and Liang sought to enforce through an extensive network of willing and generally younger political reformers was met with stiff resistance by the former elites, who were in most cases crudely or forcefully removed from their former positions. This created a backlash of political opposition by those same disenfranchised elites, who appealed to the Empress Dowager to mobilize military forces that would initiate a political coup and so deal a devastating blow to the leaders of the Reform Movement. The coup took place in early September 1898, and was militarily successful, forcing Kang, Liang, and their families to flee the empire as political and intellectual refugees. Those who did not do so—among them seven younger administrators who have been referred to later on as the "seven gentlemen" (*qi jun* 七君) and included the young philosopher and anti-Manchurian intellectual, Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–1898)—were rounded up and summarily executed by military forces under the leadership of the Chinese general, Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916). This devastating military defeat marked not only the end of the Reform Movement; it also effectively signaled the beginning of the end of the Manchurian-led Qing Empire. Ultimately, the will to "become modern"—and so to reform previously intractable traditional ways of life—continued to strengthen until the Empress Dowager herself confirmed the trend in 1904. She did so by ending the previously long-lasting imperial examination system for the sake of establishing systems of modern education built upon post-traditional categories of thinking and living. It was in the midst of all these profoundly earth-shaking events that Liang Qichao—as a

[29] Officially the Guangxu Emperor reigned from 1874 to 1910, but actually he lived under house arrest from the end of 1898 till his death in 1910, due to the machinations of the Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧 (1835–1908).

Chinese political and intellectual refugee from the Qing Empire who had taken up asylum in Japan—wrote the series of twenty articles that later were combined in the form of a book to promote his "New People Theory" (*Xinmin Shuo* 新民說) in 1902.

Before the Ruist Reform Movement took place, it is clear that both Liang and his teacher, Kang Youwei, had encountered a number of very significant and influential Protestant missionaries living and working in the Qing Empire. From a thorough study of these influences by Chen Qiyun,[30] it is known that the most influential Protestant connections that they had were with the Welsh Baptist and one-time secretary of the notable Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge (or SDCK, Guangxue hui 廣學會), Timothy Richard 李提摩太 (1845–1919), and a notable American Southern Methodist Episcopal Missionary Society representative, Young John Allen 林樂知 (1836–1907). Richard had even been invited to become the foreign secretary under Kang's leadership during the Ruist Reform Movement, but he was not able to arrive in Beijing before the military coup took place in September 1898. Undoubtedly, Liang learned much about the European Reformation from these two very prominent and prolific Protestant missionaries in China but applied it in his Ruist, and refractory, manner.

B. Liang Qichao's Portrayal of Martin Luther in his New People Theory

In the light of all the political turmoil that occurred in 1898 as described above, it is not difficult to understand why Liang Qichao initiated his seventh article in the series about his "New People Theory" with a lament regarding what he considered to be the most "backward and intractable" nation among all countries in the early twentieth century: what was still the Qing Empire, but what he referred to in a semiformal Chinese linguistic ligature as "our China" (*wu Zhongguo* 吾中國).[31] Intending to highlight his lament for the contemporary situation in the land where he had sought to promote

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[30] See Chen Qiyun 陳啟雲 "Liang Qichao yu Qingmo Xifang chuanjiaoshi zhi hudong yanjiu: Chuanjiaoshi dui yu Weixinpai yingxiang de ge'an fenxi" 梁啟超與清末西方傳教士之互動研究——傳教士對於維新派影響的個案分析, trans. Song Ou 宋鷗, in *Shixue jikan* 史學集刊 [Collected Papers of Historical Studies] 4 (July 2006): 79–96.

[31] Quoting from Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Xinmin Shuo* 新民說, ed. and annot. Huang Kun 黃坤 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1998), 77.

reform, Liang contrasted its intransigence with the bold efforts of Europeans to change their traditionally oriented Roman Catholic practices within the Holy Roman Empire into forms of life that led to the emergence of a dominant set of modern European nations which sought to explore and overtake the world around them. Gifted with a rhetorical flair that made him famous in literary circles for the rest of his life, Liang listed all those who had "made a difference" in European and North American contexts, mentioning them by name not only in Chinese but also in European letters within parentheses (a very modern form of polylingual referencing). They included, in the order of their appearance, Columbus, Martin Luther, Magellan, Livingstone, Adolphus, Peter the Great, Cromwell, Washington, Napoleon, William Egmont, Lincoln, and Mazzini.[32] From among this list, it is easy to recognize that only two were religious figures representing new religious movements: Martin Luther (1483–1546) and David Livingstone (1813–1873). Although there are other places where the "new teaching/religion" (*xinjiao* 新教)—a Chinese term of reference for "Protestantism" that is still used to this day[33]—is noted for its culturally transformative influences, as we will see subsequently, it is only in this passage that Martin Luther is mentioned specifically and described in a direct, but not always precise, manner. This is what the political refugee Liang had to say about the sixteenth-century German religious reformer:[34]

> At the time when the Roman Pope's power had reached its greatest extent, when rulers of all countries bowed down in submission, right at that time there was a monk (representatives of the Teaching of the Heavenly Lord do not marry, and so we employ the Japanese term

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[32] Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, 77–79.

[33] In the light of this term of reference it should be noted, then, that in contemporary Chinese parlance, there is no "reform" or "protest" involved directly in the naming of Protestant religious traditions, but they form a "new" religious tradition that is considered to be significantly distinct from Roman Catholic traditions and orders (not to mention others). To this day, the five authorized religions in the People's Republic of China include both the "Teaching of the Heavenly Lord" (*Tianzhu jiao* 天主教) and Protestant Christianity known either by the common term of reference "Christ Teaching" (*Jidujiao* 基督教) or (very literally) "Christ New Teaching" (*Jiduxinjiao* 基督新教). Confusion can be created by Chinese references to all forms of Christianity when the term *Jidujiao* is used for all of them, but one way of seeking to overcome that ambiguity is by using an alternative term for the general reference, *Jidu zongjiao* (lit. Christ Religion, 基督宗教).

[34] Quoting from Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, 77. English translation provided by this author.

> for Buddhist monks to refer to them here and in what follows)[35] who audaciously wrote out 96 theses [sic] [and publicly displayed them on the gate to] the district center, declaring the sins and evils of the old teachings, presenting new teachings for all under the heavens to heed. The Pope rallied together hundreds of kings and noblemen, holding court in a place where [the monk] had been arrested in order to condemn him. Charges were placed before him [regarding his claims], and the book [of judgment] was opened, but he stood firm in his responses and defense, neither submitting [nor] bending [to their claims], so that ultimately he was able to initiate the principles of freedom of religious belief (*xinjiao ziyou* 信教自由), that became a source of blessing for all humanity. This was the German (*Ri'erman* 日耳曼)[36] figure, Martin Luther (Mading Lude 馬丁路得).[37]

From this brief account of this famous encounter of Luther before the Holy Roman Emperor and his court at the Diet of Worms, it is clear that Liang was most profoundly moved by Luther's boldness and courageous convictions, noting that the impact of what he promoted as "the principles of freedom of religious belief" had been extended from that place within the Holy Roman Empire to "all humanity." Nevertheless, it is hard to understand from this account anything about Luther's resistance to "the old teachings" or Roman Catholic religious life, what the actual "sins and evils" were that Luther opposed, and how they related to the "religious freedom" that Liang highlighted. It is not even mentioned that Luther was condemned to death by that court, being given a month before he was supposed to be executed. How he managed to escape that condemnation and survive for another thirty years, initiating the Reformation four years after the Diet of Worms, and being involved not only in the production of the first German Bible, but

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[35] The term "monk" is *yi jie senglu* 一介僧侶. The parenthetical statement explaining its use is in the original text. In contrast, contemporary Chinese Roman Catholics will generally refer to a "priest" by two terms, *shenfu* 神甫 and *shenfu* 神父, or in a more religiously literary manner, *siduo* 司鐸.

[36] The reference term for "German" here is not the Chinese word employed for the modern state of Germany, but a cultural name referring to the German culture in pre-modern times.

[37] A literal rendering of Luther's name in Chinese is worth noting. Rather than follow the Chinese pattern of placing the family name first, Liang simply provided sounds that paralleled his given and family names in that order. Luther's given name in Chinese can mean "a "horse soldier" or cavalry man; his family name suggested that his "road" was "obtained." Strangely, then, for Chinese readers who had never heard of Luther, it sounded like he was a person who was a soldier who managed to succeed in his military tasks.

many other aspects of German-speaking European life are completely overlooked. It would seem that Liang's Luther simply achieved his goals of promoting "religious freedom" by not "submitting or bending" to the Holy Roman emperor's court, an account that is far too simplistic.

C. Reconsidering Liang's Reception of Martin Luther's Role in the German Reformation

After reviewing what Liang Qichao did not understand about the historical details of Luther's protest against the Roman Catholic Church of his day, one can understandably ask whether or not Liang grasped anything substantially about the culturally transformative influence of the religious dimension of the sixteenth-century German Reformation. Although one might demur at what seems far too brief and superficial an account of all that Luther accomplished, what has been seen above is that Liang associated Martin Luther's unwillingness to accept the verdict of the Diet of Worms as the starting point for "religious freedom." In fact, in the ninth essay of the same series of articles, one devoted to the theme of "freedom," Liang made this explicit. Citing 35 critical events that promoted freedom in European and North American continents, stretching from 1532 to 1901, it is notable that the first five events are related to what he refers to as "freedom within religion" (*zongjiao shang zhi ziyou* 宗教上之自由). Notably, Liang does not start with the Diet of Worms in 1517 but begins with the first political treaty between Roman Catholics ("the old teaching" *jiujiao* 舊教) and Protestants ("the new teaching" *xinjiao* 新教) that confirmed the political realization of "religious freedom" (*xinjiao ziyou* 信教自由).[38] In other words, Liang sensed that the initiation of modern political freedoms began first with the affirmation of religious freedom, a matter that had also marked his shift in February 1902 from being a promoter of Ruist religion as the new state religion of a modern form of Chinese governance to a promoter of general religious freedom.[39] (Notably,

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[38] See the charts listing these historical developments in Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, 100–102. These occur in the ninth article, a section of his work entitled "On Freedom."

[39] This is the main thesis argued for and documented in Cui Zhihai 崔志海, "Lun Wuxu qianhou Liang Qichao baojiao sixiang de kending yu fouding" 論戊戌前後梁啟超保教思想的肯定與否定 [On the Affirmation and Negation of Liang Qichao's Thought of Protecting Education before and after the Reform Movement of 1898], *Forest of Historical Studies* 史林 6 (2003): 91–98, esp. 96–98.

this was an explicit and significant difference between his own intellectual and political development and that of his teacher, Kang Youwei, who remained a promoter of Ruist religion as the state religion even until his death in 1927.)

While this politically discursive use of Luther's religious resistance to the reigning Roman Catholic leadership might still appear to be rather manipulative and anachronous, it is notable that Thomas Howard has recently confirmed that Luther's status as a "German hero" in the nineteenth century became more and more a dominant theme within reflections on the religious Reformation he initiated.[40] Though one might still claim legitimately that Liang in 1902 had not thoroughly grasped the historical nature of the German Reformation initiated by Martin Luther, he had nevertheless understood something about its political impact within a broader range of cultural movements in the European context.

IV. REFLECTIONS ON THE LIMITS OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION'S CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS IN MICHELANGELO'S *LAST JUDGMENT* AND LIANG QICHAO'S "NEW PEOPLE THEORY"

Here I want to readdress the questions initially raised at the end of our introduction: How transformative were Michelangelo and Liang Qichao in their cultural influences within their own historical and cultural settings? Can there be some transformative cultural influences and impacts that are initiated but then ultimately fail? Were these influences and impacts recognized already by Michelangelo and Liang Qichao in their situations, or were they still inchoate enough that they were not able to discern their significance and/or their subsequent developments?

Without question, the more or less direct impact of the Italian Reformation by means of the impact of Virtuban spirituality on Michelangelo's later life, as revealed also in his monumental mural paint-

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[40] As elaborated in Thomas Albert Howard, "Remembering the Reformation, 1617, 1817, and 1883: Commemoration as an Agent of Continuity and Change," in Thomas Albert Howard and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Protestantism After 500 Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 25–51.

ing of *The Last Judgment* completed in the Sistine Chapel in 1541, is manifest in far more ways than the traces of cultural and political influences found in that singular passage in Liang Qichao's "New People Theory." While all this should be unquestionable, I would like to take up some other perspectives that might suggest other reasons to qualify these claims.

One of those perspectives is the fact that the German Reformation had only taken place about twenty years before Michelangelo began painting *The Last Judgment*, so that the deeper and wider cross-cultural impacts of the German Protestant break-away from Roman Catholic religious teachings and their related institutions were still only inchoate. Certainly more important for Michelangelo's spiritual "conversion" (as claimed by de Tolnay) were the impacts of the Malermi Bible, the indirect spiritual influences of the Spanish reformer, Juan de Valdés, and the profoundly influential intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic correspondence he maintained for nearly ten years with Vittoria Colonna. When viewed from a larger cultural perspective bound up with all the political and religious traumata experienced in the Italian Peninsula during the sixteenth century, it is notable to underscore the fact that *The Last Judgment* had been completed years before the Jesuit Order had been formally initiated in Rome, and twenty years before the Lateran Council met to consolidate a Roman Catholic response to the emerging northern European secessionists that created new Protestant kingdoms and states to challenge the religious authority, cultural form of existence, and basic institutions associated with Roman Catholic traditions within the Holy Roman Empire. As a consequence, nothing of the international missionary movement that headed toward Asia in the later sixteenth century, or the internal Roman Catholic reforms that occurred, starting in Spain with the writings of the later mystics—Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) and Juan de la Cruz (John of the Cross, 1154–1591)—were reflected within those Virtuban spiritual emphases. Put into other images, in the mural of *The Last Judgment* almost all the figures are based on European ethnic models, manifesting nothing of the wide-ranging images of ethnic diversity that would become part of a world-wide Jesuit missionary movement, but also expressed in biblical eschatological images—made explicit especially in the last book of the New Testament, Revelation.[41] Even despite these

[41] So, even though "all nations" are mentioned in Matthew 24:9 and 30, there is no elaboration about how vast or complicated that conception of the totality of "nations" at that time would be. Rather, in that Gospel context, the focus remains on Israel and

Reform theological influences within his life, it is undeniable that Michelangelo was still working very much within much more limited Italian and European cultural contexts within his artistic works, applying many ancient Mediterranean and so-called classical historical images within his aesthetic and theological sensibilities. Where Liang Qichao was aware of what now might be called the "global impact" of the German Reformation, there are no East Asian, Indian, or African persons depicted in Michelangelo's murals on the ceiling or the wall in the Sistine Chapel. Though he is known as one of the most imaginative painters and sculptors of the late medieval era, Michelangelo had no means to envision the modern missionary movements that would begin in the mid-sixteenth century and expand to envelop a concrete awareness of the breadth and diversity of the earthly planet that had essentially remained unknown to the vast majority of Europeans in his age. The historical realities of the culturally transformative influences of the German Reformation, including their stimulus within Roman Catholic orders and especially among the Jesuits, were far more strange, incredible, and impactful than Michelangelo could even imagine.

Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century and at least three years after the crushing imperial opposition to the Ruist Reform Movement in which he had served in a leading role, Liang Qichao linked Martin Luther to a host of other "Western" (that is, Mediterranean, European, and North American) figures who had brought about undeniably transformative impacts within their cultural milieux. Intending to stimulate a desire to have a "new" form of "people" arise within the Manchurian imperial context of the Qing dynasty, Liang was actually—and most likely un-self-consciously—echoing a theme that Protestant Reformers including Luther repeated continuously: In the Spirit of Christ, all things become new, and people are transformed from "old persons" into "new" ones. Here the limits of the medium that Liang chose to employ—newspaper editorials imbued with explicit intentions to incite change and opposition to the ruling powers in the Qing dynasty—restrained Liang from writing too much about Luther as a subject of religious cross-cultural significance. Certainly, Liang

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Jerusalem to a very large extent, as well as those who would become followers of Christ. In contrast, the salvation "purchased" by the "blood of the Lamb" was extended to people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9), and the worship of the Living God and the Lamb is shared by "every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea" (Rev. 5:13). Similarly, the plagues and destruction of those who oppose the Living God are multitudinous and described at great length in four chapters from Revelation 16 to 20.

Qichao's extensive exposure to the Welsh Baptist missionary, Timothy Richard, and the American missionary, Young John Allen, made it possible for him to learn much more about Luther than what is revealed in that short passage within the "New People's Theory." But his purpose was to induce action, and not to write an academic treatise. In that regard, in spite of the notoriety of his works published in 1902, the Reform Movement ended up being a blatant political failure, even while Lutheran missionaries from a wide variety of European and North American settings continued to have spiritual engagements and cultural impacts among a rather finite and small group of Chinese persons within the Qing Empire.

One hint that Liang had learned more about Luther than he revealed in his 1902 essays has been underscored in a brief article in Chinese dealing with his understanding of Protestant Christianity. Twenty years after penning his "New People Theory," Liang stood against a massive anti-Christian movement, arguing that Protestant Christianity had proven that "faith" (*xinyang* 信仰) was more than a merely subjective feeling, but was in fact the "original vitality" (*yuanqi* 元氣) of society.[42] This is a far more impressive summary of what Luther's religious Reformation meant to subsequent culturally transformative developments in Europe and internationally than Liang had dared to write about in 1902.

From these additional perspectives, then, it is possible to see all the more clearly the cultural limitations of both Michelangelo's and Liang Qichao's responses to various expressions of the Christian Reformation. From the perspective of their own lives and their eras, Michelangelo's life was personally transformed by what he learned from Vittoria Colonna and the Virtuban spiritual circle, but their impact with broader Italian cultural circles was effectively snuffed out by the subsequent impact of the Inquisition and the multifaceted attack against the changes associated with Luther's work in the Counter-Reformation. In a very different way, Liang Qichao's appeal to Martin Luther's courageous efforts was notable but ended up having less impact than the revolutionary ideologies that ultimately toppled the Qing Empire in 1911. If we are to affirm that both men's intellectual reception of some expression of Protestant spirituality stemming from the German Reformation was influential within their lives, the level of culturally

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[42] See Zheng Delong 鄭德龍, "Xinyang shi shehui de yuanqi: Liang Qichao de Jidujiao guan" 信仰是社會的元氣——梁啟超的基督教觀 [Faith is the Vitality of Society: Liang Qichao's View of Christianity], *Studies of Culture* 文化研究 4 (April 2015): 170–71.

transformative changes that proceeded subsequently from their influences was largely subdued, if not completely overturned, by other cultural movements. Theirs may have been a culturally transformative moment within the international reception of the Reformation, but they were also ultimately failures from the angle of their cultural impact.

From a more theologically informed perspective, it would seem that Michelangelo had grasped a deeper and more precise understanding of the biblical claims related to the Reformation than Liang Qichao. The Italian's understanding of specific biblical claims and their expression in the world around him was clearly more evident within his writings and his artistic accomplishments, while it is not so clear that Liang ever read a Chinese version of the Bible, even though he had seen the vitality of the modern Protestant missionary movement in and through the lives and works of Richard and Young. Liang remained an open-hearted intellectual who later turned away from his Ruist inclinations toward a specific form of Chinese Buddhist religious life, and so it would seem that the religious encounter he had experienced by learning about Luther and engaging those contemporary foreign and Chinese Christian intellectuals he had come to know did not have much of a personal or cultural impact within his own life.

It is of interest to repeat the claim of Maghenzani that within the Italian Peninsula in the period from 1550 to 1660 there was a greater impact of Calvinist theology and ideology than of Luther's German Reformation.[43] Now, in the second decade of the twentieth-first century, it is still worthwhile asking what kind of Protestant Christianity has had a greater impact within the swelling communities of Chinese Protestantism. What seems to be more predominant now in the People's Republic of China are forms of evangelicalism and Pentecostalism that would be rejected as theologically insufficient or even culturally problematic when viewed from a broad range of central themes within the works of both Luther and Calvin. But these are matters for a different kind of study, one that could still be addressed from the angle of the culturally transformative influences of European expressions of Reformation theology and life stemming from the sixteenth century in Europe.

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[43] See Maghenzani, "The Protestant Reformation in Counter-Reformation Italy," 573.

Note for interested readers: A helpful visual means to view all aspects of the Sistine Chapel can be accessed on the Vatican website: www.vatican.va/various/cappelle/index_sistina_en.htm